

Opposition Testimony to HB 5326

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As a daughter, a wife, a mother, a nurse and one who as all of us here will enter the dying process I oppose physician assisted suicide. It counters natural law and could inhibit the possibility of sharing with another a most intimate expression of love and compassion; the opportunity to accompany another, to support another through their last days on earth. To many of us this is a time of transition from our earthly life to our return to our God. But no matter what our beliefs, it is a solitary time...no one else will be dying with us. As a result it can create a sense of fear, a fear of the unknown.

My 93 year old mother always said before she died, "I am not afraid of dying but I worry about how I will die." How many of us share that same fear? When she developed liver cancer there was always the risk during her dying process that she could experience acute pain reflective of changes within her liver. But with the support of her oncologist and the hospice team we had liquid morphine that could be dropped under her tongue to treat her pain. What evolved was probably one of the most loving experiences of our family life and affected four generations of our family. She requested to spend time with each of us individually; a wonderful opportunity to express to each other feelings which we had not taken time in our busy lives to communicate earlier; our sons and their families came to our home every weekend to enjoy their last times with Grammy Shea. We reminisced, we laughed, we cried, her young great grandchildren sat on her bed with her singing a song or showing her drawings that they had created. When she died it was in her own bed, in our home with my husband and me holding her hand.

Was fear part of this process? Yes it certainly was, even as a nurse I was afraid that we might not be able to meet her needs. But the support of Franciscan Hospice to my mother and our family guided us through the process, answered our questions, and gave us the courage to rise above our fears.

In my 40 plus years as a nurse I have seen similar experiences by many families as they cared for their loved ones through the dying process. After the person passes away families are left with the consolation of having done everything possible for someone they love in this lifetime. Grief is present but not guilt. As human persons to accompany someone through their dying process is a most noble privilege.

Our local Hospices have the ability to manage symptoms and to support the person and the caregivers physically, emotionally and spiritually. There is no need for this proposed bill in Connecticut.